Wisconsin National Primate Research Center
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

WNPRC Pilot Research Awards Announcement

2025/26 Key Dates – REVISED

Nov 24, 2025	Letter of Intent deadline – **extended to 11/24**
Jan 30, 2026	Full application deadline
May 1, 2026	Earliest funding start date

The Wisconsin National Primate Research Center (WNPRC) is soliciting proposals for its 2025 pilot grants research program. Pilot research is intended to help investigators generate preliminary data or results necessary to apply for support from other primary sources of funding. Pilot Research Projects may include preliminary activities on biomedical research topics in keeping with the main research areas of the WNPRC (Regenerative and Reproductive Medicine, Global Infectious Disease, Neuroscience, and Energy Metabolism and Chronic Disease) and are typically developmental or exploratory in nature. Additionally, researchers are highly encouraged to include activities related to new approach methodologies (NAMs). Examples of NAMs include *ex vivo* primate-based approaches, including perfused primate organs and precision-cut tissue slices; in vitro methods, including microphysiological systems and organoids; computational and artificial intelligence-based approaches; and combinations thereof. Investigators at early phases of their careers are especially encouraged to apply, as are those new to research utilizing nonhuman primates (NHPs). To further promote foundational work on aging biology, the WNPRC and Wisconsin Nathan Shock Center (WiNSC) Research Development Core will jointly support one Pilot Research Award focused on aging with an emphasis on metabolism and/or translation in NHPs and/or NAMs. For example, studies focused on Hallmarks of Aging or processes identified as important in aging of shorter-lived species. The awards provide a maximum of $70,000 (direct costs) over a two-year period. Pilot projects are aimed at helping to solve problems related to human health, and they should lead to independent grant support related to the disease or health problem being studied.

Selection of projects for funding will be based on their potential to generate high-impact preliminary data that will result in peer-reviewed research project grants from outside sources and in peer-reviewed publications, and on how well they meet the three factors considered in NIH review: 1) importance of the proposed research, 2) rigor and feasibility, and 3) expertise and appropriateness of available resources.

PILOT RESEARCH PROGRAM GUIDELINES

- Eligible Principal Investigators (PIs) include researchers with faculty or faculty equivalent appointments at academic institutions. In exceptional cases, senior postdoctoral researchers

who show promise of becoming independent investigators may apply if a letter of support from their department chair or division/unit chief is provided. PIs may submit one application per funding cycle.

- Projects that involve the active participation of investigators external to the WNPRC are strongly encouraged, as are projects from early career investigators and those who are new to NHP research. NIH guidelines stipulate that "At least one-half of funded pilot projects over the P51 award period must involve the active participation of investigators external to the NPRC and grantee institution."
- While the PI does not need to be a WNPRC Core Scientist, all pilot research projects must be planned, conducted, and carried out with the involvement of at least one WNPRC Core Scientist, and may include other WNPRC personnel. WNPRC Core Scientists may co-sponsor more than one application per funding cycle and serve as co-sponsors for funded applications in consecutive years.
- All activities related to the use of NHPs must be conducted on site at the WNPRC. Other activities can be performed at other sites, depending on the nature of the pilot project. If relevant, a subcontracting mechanism within the pilot project can be used to support a component of the pilot project performed outside of WNPRC. Applicants must understand that applicable F&A will need to be included on any proposed subcontract budget; therefore, direct costs available for the project will be reduced accordingly.
- Funds may be used for essential project personnel not already supported by the WNPRC base grant, supplies including animals and animal care costs, minor equipment under $5,000 (with permission), and consultants and other expenses, such as surgery, pathology, assays, or clinical services for the approved project only.
- Funds are **not** to be used for interim support of established projects, for investigators funded from other sources, for capital equipment ($5K or more), or for travel.
- Written annual progress reports will be required.
- Awardees must have UW-Madison IACUC and Biosafety approved protocols in place before receiving pilot project funds.
- Awardees are expected to submit a manuscript to a peer-reviewed, scientific journal and/or submit a grant application to one or more external agencies as part of the successful execution of the pilot project.
- The following acknowledgement must be included on all publications that result from WNPRC support (funding and/or infrastructure services): *This publication was made possible with Pilot Program support from the Wisconsin National Primate Research Center, NIH grant number P51OD011106.*

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

Letter of Intent (LOI)

Prospective applicants should contact Dr Ari Rosenberg, Professor of Neuroscience and WNPRC Associate Director of Research Strategy & Innovation at ari.rosenberg@wisc.edu, or an appropriate core scientist well in advance of the LOI deadline to discuss the proposed project and to gain a preliminary assessment of its feasibility and alignment with the WNPRC mission.

Letters of intent will address the following points and should be submitted as responses using our Qualtrics LOI form here: https://uwmadison.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_25IhxY33CuM03Km

- Are you considered to be an early-stage investigator or new to utilizing NHPs?
- Brief summary of the scientific plan. (~500 words)

- Why is this a "pilot" application and how will the data generated be applied to future funding applications? (~100 words)
- How does the proposed project differ from the PI's current research? (~100 words)
- How can the proposed research be accomplished in two years at the requested budget? (~100 words)
- What animal resources are requested?
- What WNPRC Research Services will be requested?
- Indicate affiliated WNPRC core scientist.

Full Application

Investigators who are invited to submit will be sent an application form to complete. Required information includes a description of the animal resources and WNPRC research services needed for the proposed study. This information will be used to determine availability of WNPRC resources, including animals and technical services.

In addition to the application form, the following materials will be required:

- Specific aims (up to 1 page; not included in page limit)
- Biosketches for PI and Key Personnel (NIH format; not included in page limit)
- Other Support for PI; potential overlap of the proposed project with existing funding must be addressed (NIH format; not included in page limit)
- WNPRC budget form listing personnel, animals, assays, services, etc.
- Budget justification (not included in page limit)
- Project narrative (maximum 6 pages, including Significance, Innovation, Approach, and Timeline for completion of project)
- References cited (not included in page limit)
- Letter(s) of support from WNPRC or UW-Madison collaborator(s) (not included in page limit)
- A list of four potential reviewers who are not in conflict of interest as defined by the NIH:
    - Employed by the same organization
    - A scientific collaboration within the past 3 years
    - Mentor – mentee relationship within the past 10 years
    - Close relative or personal friend
    - Provided input to the planned research
- Non-preferred reviewers may also be indicated

REVIEW PROCESS

Each WNPRC Pilot Project proposal received is subject to confidential project review by external reviewers for scientific merit and feasibility. External referees are selected by WNPRC Executive Committee members (one from each WNPRC Working Group), the Director of the Pilot Project Research Program (PPRP), and the WNPRC Director, based on their scientific expertise. If an Executive Committee member has any involvement in a pilot project, they will be recused from the review process and will be replaced by another member from the same WNPRC Working Group to maintain a balanced committee roster. The PPRP scoring criteria will be identical to that used for the NIH grant review. If a project is determined to be of high scientific merit, there will be an additional review by the Executive Committee and senior management team for scientific fit with WNPRC goals, future fundability, and feasibility.

Note: All projects must also have an approved UW-Madison IACUC-approved protocol and Biosafety protocol in place before any project can be activated. These protocols can be prepared after initial review and scoring of the proposals.

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE SUMMARIZED FROM THE NPRC GUIDELINES, NINTH EDITION

The five major criteria to be used in evaluating Pilot Research Projects and Resource Related Research Projects are as follows:

1. Significance: Does this study address an important problem? If the Aims of the project are achieved, how will scientific knowledge be advanced? What will the effect of these studies be on the concepts or methods that drive this field?
2. Approach: Are the conceptual framework, design, including composition of study population, methods, and analyses developed adequately, well-integrated, and appropriate to the Aims of the project? Does the applicant acknowledge potential problem areas and consider alternative tactics?
3. Innovation: Does the project employ novel concepts, approaches or methods? Are the Aims original and innovative? Does the project challenge existing paradigms or develop new methodologies or technologies?
4. Investigator: Is/are the investigator(s) appropriately trained and well suited to carry out this work? Is the work proposed appropriate to the experience level of the Principal Investigator and other researchers (if any)? PLEASE DO NOT INCLUDE descriptive biographical information unless important to the evaluation of merit.
5. Environment: Does the scientific environment in which the work will be done contribute to the probability of success? Do the proposed experiments take advantage of unique features of the scientific environment or employ useful collaborative arrangements? Is there evidence of institutional support? PLEASE DO NOT INCLUDE description of available facilities or equipment unless important to the evaluation of merit.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

For questions related to animal resources, please contact Dr Saverio Capuano, Attending Veterinarian and WNPRC Associate Director, Animal Services Division at capuano@primate.wisc.edu.

For questions regarding the application process, please contact the WNPRC Grants Management Team at gm@primate.wisc.edu.